

## **PLANNING BOARD**

March 16, 2005

**Members Present:** Martha Morrison, Stephen Whelan, Jim Decoulos, Jan Ablon  
Gregor Smith

**Visitors:** Dick Gandt, Cynthia & Benedict Celso, Cindy O'Connell, Steve Gillis

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 PM

**I. Public Hearing – Family Accessory Apt. – 6 Roberts Rd.** – Steve opened the Public Hearing and read the legal notice as printed. The Celso family are living in a home that has been set up for possible accessory apartment. It was like this when purchased. Now the son, wife and children wish to apply for amnesty from the Planning Board for a Family Accessory Apartment. They have been living in the house since November, 2004. Steve moved to allow with an extension of amnesty; Jim seconded the motion to extend the amnesty until June 30, 2005; Vote 5-0. Jim moved to approve the Special Permit for a Family Accessory Apartment for 6 Roberts Rd.; Steve seconded; Vote 5-0.

**II. Fee Schedule** - The Board members reviewed fee schedules of towns comparable to Topsfield. Martha explained to Dick Gant that the Board was trying to make a reasonable effort to justify the cost of hiring a Planner. Currently the fees collected by the Planning Board go through the Town Clerk and deposited by the Town Accountant into the general fund. Dick explained it would be better to allocate fees according to the cost to the Town in reviewing Definitive Plans and other duties of the Planning Board. Dick stating .. you have a reasonable understanding of what those costs are to the Town suggested to the Board when confronting the Finance Committee or Town citizens have a multitude of answers ready for whatever questions arise. Steve Gillis, contractor didn't agree that the Town should raise application fees to developers to justify the cost of hiring a Planner. He stated there is a tipping point when it comes to fees versus taxes. Gant stated it is clear the fees have to be fair. Steve stated that need to calculate the time spent on each application by different departments, adding that it would be difficult to average out, as there will always be one that will cost more. Gregor suggested consolidating all this information into a table. He volunteered to do a spreadsheet comparing Topsfield to other selected towns. The Board will continue to work on the Fee schedule.

**III. Elderly Housing District Bylaw** – The Board is currently in the process of

proposing an Elderly Housing District Bylaw that applies to any subdivision before them.

Cindy O'Connell, Beals Associates had questions relative to the proposed Hickory Beech Dev'l regarding the road frontage requirement. Although not on the Agenda, the Board tried to accommodate her. She proposed to show the necessary road frontage of 50 ft. narrowing down to 10 ft strip of land to the proposed Elderly Housing District. The lot proposed for the Elderly Housing District as an ANR does not show the required frontage on a public road. Jim suggested she provide the necessary metes and bounds that she first configured and on Town Meeting floor he might move to amend for approval a lot that does not have required frontage. Jim was also concerned with the closeness of the buildings within the district. Martha queried Cindy relative to the perc testing scheduled for April and asked if the perc testing information was in order. Also Martha asked about the meeting scheduled with the Conservation Commission for March 23, and how they would be able to answer questions at Town Meeting. Cindy stated she would do the necessary calculations and would be ready for Town Meeting. Martha will contact Town Counsel relative to two issues brought fourth: 1.) the narrow 10 foot connection to the required 50 foot road frontage and 2.) if there is a requirement of the buildable area in the elderly housing district to be contiguous. Martha then suggested the group leave enough undeveloped area in the Elderly Housing District for the unpredictable i.e. location of wells, etc.

Steve stated the need to do the calculations of affordable housing and the cash payment to the Town. The board is looking for a formula rather than a flat amount. When asked what percentage would count in affordable housing cost, the answer was 15 %. The options are: on site affordable; off site affordable; or a cash contribution

Jan Ablon stated she is not in favor of a buy-out provision. Martha commented research proves it not favorable. Jim stated that if it's in the bylaw, it's our option. The principle of planning is to include options. Steve suggested to take the Affordable Housing Trust proposal prepared by Town Counsel and use the money as seed money, i.e. waste water plant, increase affordable, etc. We need to create a mechanism. Jim suggested putting it in a trust and when the opportunity arises, use the trustees' vote.

Jim made a motion to require the developer to build 15% of units as affordable low income and as our option the developer may build elsewhere in Town the same number of units or more at an alternate site at equivalent cost or make a cash contribution to the Town of an amount determined by the difference of the average market price of unit price less the low income affordable housing price; Steve seconded; Vote 3-2.

Dick Gant stated that the Board is asking the Town's residents to vote on an Elderly

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Housing District and if the applicant or the Board can't answer all the questions, they would need pictures and a good plan to display. The Town residents will have many questions. Cindy said she would be well prepared.

By unanimous vote the meeting adjourned at 11:10 PM

Respectfully submitted

Kathleen E. Smith  
Secretary